



Deuteronomy - Chapter Fourteen

III Deuteronomy 12:1-26:19 - Moses' Second Speech: Specific Covenant Stipulations (continues)

Summary of Chapter Fourteen

After a brief statement warning the people not to follow certain pagan practices, Moses then outlines the various foods that the people may and may not eat. Finally, he deals with the tithes and offerings the people are to make.

III.c Deuteronomy 14:1-2 - Pagan Practices Forbidden

Moses warns against certain pagan practices.

¹ You are children of the Lord your God. You must not lacerate yourselves or shave your forelocks for the dead.

Deuteronomy 14:1

For the parallel passage to vv.1-2, refer to Leviticus 21:5-6.

To call the people children of the Lord your God in the OT is rare, but not unknown; refer also to Deuteronomy 1:31 and 8:5. Israel as a whole is God's 'son' <<*Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, 'Let my son go that he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son"*>> (Exodus 4:22-23), and: <<*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son*>> (Hosea 11:1), and its members are also 'sons' or 'children' <<*Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me*>> (Isaiah 1:2). This has now become a gifted right to Christians: <<*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God*>> (John 1:12), and: <<*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God*>> (Romans 8:14).

You must not lacerate yourselves or shave your forelocks for the dead. Probably both of these activities relate to pagan practices, the latter for mourning: <<*You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 19:27-28), and: <<*Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them*>> (1 Kings 18:28). Such practices are therefore forbidden to Israelites, who are holy to the Lord. Refer to Deuteronomy 7:6 and the comment made there.

Among Christians today, there is something wrong if their burial customs are just as the rituals of the ungodly. Paul wrote: <<*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:13). They may certainly mourn the passing of their loved ones, but as those who have eternal hope in Jesus, they should be different in their mourning.

² For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; it is you the Lord has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Deuteronomy 14:2

For you are a people holy to the Lord. The idea behind holy is 'separate.' The people of Israel were a people separated to and for the Lord. In Jesus, Christians also are a holy people: <<*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*>> (1 Peter 2:9).

It is you the Lord has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be his people. The people of Israel were chosen by God, to be his own special people. In Jesus, Christians also are a chosen people, special to God. Refer to 1 Peter 2:9 above.

His treasured possession. The people of Israel were a special treasure to God. In Jesus, Christians also are a special treasure to God: <<*what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints*>> (Ephesians 1:18b).

Each of these glorious privileges carried with it a special responsibility. If God regarded Israel as something special among the nations, they had to conduct themselves as something special among the nations.

III.d Deuteronomy 14:3-21 - Clean and Unclean Foods

Israel's diet was to be distinctive, reflecting its own distinctiveness in God's election from among all nations. More details are given in Leviticus Chapter 11.

³ You shall not eat any abhorrent thing.

Deuteronomy 14:3

Unclean animals are regarded as abhorrent or an abomination. Clean and unclean animals are separated to illustrate the separation of Israel from other nations (v.2). The distinctions are not related to hygiene, nor are unclean animals hateful to God, indeed: <<*He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry*>> (Psalm 147:9) shows God's care for them. When the Gospel breaks down the separation between Israel and the Gentiles, all foods are declared clean: <<*He said to them, 'Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?'* (Thus he declared all foods clean)>> (Mark 7:18-19); refer also to Acts 10:9-16 and 1 Timothy 4:3-5.

⁴ These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, ⁵ the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain-sheep. ⁶ Any animal that divides the hoof and has the hoof cloven in two, and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. ⁷ Yet of those that chew the cud or have the hoof cloven you shall not eat these: the camel, the hare, and the rock-badger, because they chew the cud but do not divide the hoof; they are unclean for you. ⁸ And the pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. You shall not eat their meat, and you shall not touch their carcasses.

Deuteronomy 14:4-8

These are the animals you may eat. Only certain mammals were allowed to be eaten, and the rule was simple. Clean animals both have a cloven hoof and chew the cud. If only one criterion is met, the animal is unclean. Cleanness cannot be based on the animals' vegetarian diet, as the camel, hare, and rock-badger are vegetarian as well.

You shall not eat their meat, and you shall not touch their carcasses. It was not just the consumption of such animals for food that was forbidden but even coming into contact with their carcasses would make a person ceremonially unclean. Even after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the apostle Peter kept to this law: <<*But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean'*>> (Acts 10:14), not understanding that such laws had been fulfilled through Christ's sacrifice: <<*The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane'*>> (Acts 10:15).

⁹ Of all that live in water you may eat these: whatever has fins and scales you may eat. ¹⁰ And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.

Deuteronomy 14:9-10

Of all that live in water you may eat these. Only certain sea creatures could be eaten, and the rule was again simple to follow. For seafood to be clean, it needs both fins and scales; again, both criteria are to be met.

¹¹ You may eat any clean birds. ¹² But these are the ones that you shall not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, ¹³ the buzzard, the kite of any kind; ¹⁴ every raven of any kind; ¹⁵ the ostrich, the nighthawk, the seagull, the hawk of any kind; ¹⁶ the little owl and the great owl, the water-hen ¹⁷ and the desert-owl, the carrion vulture and the cormorant, ¹⁸ the stork, the heron of any kind; the hoopoe and the bat. ¹⁹ And all winged insects are unclean for you; they shall not be eaten. ²⁰ You may eat any clean winged creature.

Deuteronomy 14:11-20

You may eat any clean birds. While no summary criteria are given to distinguish clean birds from unclean, the unclean seem to be birds of prey. These eat carrion and blood, which are forbidden to Israelites (v.21a).

These animals generally fall into one of three categories: predators (unclean because they ate both the flesh and the blood of animals), scavengers (unclean because they were carriers of disease, and they regularly contacted dead bodies), or potentially poisonous or dangerous foods such as shellfish and the like. Eliminating these from the diet of Israel no doubt had a healthy effect, and one of the reasons for the dietary laws of Israel was to keep Israel healthy!

^{21a} You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to aliens residing in your towns for them to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 14:21a

You shall not eat anything that dies of itself. This verse shows the different levels of people in Israelite society. Israelites cannot eat anything that has died naturally, probably because the blood is still in the animal. However, a foreigner can eat that dead animal, and it can also be sold to Gentiles.

It was important to bleed animals before eating them, because the blood represented the life principle of the animal: <<*For the life of the flesh is in the*

blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement>> (Leviticus 17:11), and the life principle belonged to God and God alone. Another reason for the dietary laws was to project an important symbolism to Israel regarding blood and the sanctity of the life principle.

Holy to the Lord. At its heart, holiness means being exclusively separated to God. Hence Israel must have no association with pagan religion.

^{21b} You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

Deuteronomy 14:21b

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk is also stated in Exodus 23:19 and 34:26. This prohibition may be a polemic against Canaanite magical practices. It is also an affront to God's creative design: kids, i.e. young goats, should be given life by drinking their mothers' milk; they are not to be cooked in it. A similar example shows how the natural life cycle can be sustained: *<<If you come on a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs, with the mother sitting on the fledglings or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. Let the mother go, taking only the young for yourself, in order that it may go well with you and you may live long>> (Deuteronomy 22:6-7).*

This law, because of strange rabbinical interpretations, became the reason why one cannot have a kosher cheeseburger. Observant Jews today will not eat milk and meat at the same meal, or even on the same plates with the same utensils cooked in the same pots, because the rabbis insist that the meat in the hamburger may have come from the calf of the cow that gave the milk for the cheese, and the cheese and the meat would 'boil' together in one's stomach, and be a violation of this command.

III.e Deuteronomy 14:22-29 - Regulations concerning Tithes

Giving a tithe, i.e. ten percent, was a practice as early as Abram with Melchizedek: *<<And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything>> (Genesis 14:20b).* Refer to Leviticus 27:30-33 and Numbers 18:8-32 for more specific aspects of the tithing laws. Moses stresses what to do with these tithes. By NT times, Jews gave a tithe to the Levites as well as a tithe for a feast.

²² Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field. ²³ In the presence of the Lord your God, in the place that he will choose as a dwelling for his name, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your herd and flock, so that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

Deuteronomy 14:22-23

Set apart a tithe. God required that ten percent of everything received be given back to him to acknowledge that he gave everything to start with. Setting it apart would ensure it was given otherwise too much could be used up, and thus not leaving enough for a full ten percent to be given. Paul endorsed the practice of setting apart one's offering although he never specified a particular amount to give: <<*On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come*>> (1 Corinthians 16:2). That is to be a matter of the heart.

All the yield of your seed. Seemingly, this meant the grain left over after the seed-grain was taken out. This meant that the tithe was assessed on the income, not on the total assets.

In the presence of the Lord your God. When the tithe was delivered to the tabernacle and later, to the temple, a portion of the tithe was enjoyed in a ceremonial meal 'with' the Lord. The remainder was given to the priest.

In the place that he will choose. God would later direct the people to a single place where first the tabernacle would be set up and later when Solomon would build God's temple in Jerusalem. Refer to Deuteronomy 12:5-6 and the comments made there.

You shall eat the tithe of your grain. Deuteronomy's emphasis on festive celebration of the land's blessing is seen here with an annual tithe party. The whole household (v.26) plus the Levites (v.27) are to be included.

The dedication of **the firstlings**, i.e. the firstborn child or animal is a common OT principle: <<*The Lord said to Moses: Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine*>> (Exodus 13:1-2), and: <<*She made this vow: 'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head'*>> (1 Samuel 1:11).

Learn to fear the Lord. Tithing does not mean the giving of the surplus. Tithing would teach Israel to fear or trust God that the remaining ninety percent was sufficient and that God would provide for them each year. Israel should have learned this fear through the provision of manna in the wilderness: <<*He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*>> (Deuteronomy 8:3).

²⁴ But if, when the Lord your God has blessed you, the distance is so great that you are unable to transport it, because the place where the Lord your God will choose to set his name is too far away from you, ²⁵ then you may turn it into money. With the money secure in hand, go to the place that the Lord your God will choose; ²⁶ spend the money for whatever you wish – oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever you desire. And you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your household rejoicing together.

Deuteronomy 14:24-26

But if, the distance is so great. Since the tithe was to be brought to one place for the whole nation, some would have to travel farther than others. And, if someone was too far away, they would find it difficult to transport the grain and livestock the tithe required. However, distance from the central sanctuary is no excuse for not tithing, but to make the travel easier, converting the tithe into money is allowed.

When the Lord your God has blessed you. Underlining this whole legislation is a clear expectation of blessing.

Then you may turn it into money. If distance prevented the easy transport of the animals, they could exchange their tithe for money, and then use the money to tithe with when they came to the tabernacle and later, to the temple.

Wine, strong drink, or whatever you desire. While condemning drunkenness, and forbidding priests to drink while in the sanctuary: <<*Drink no wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons, when you enter the tent of meeting, that you may not die; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations*>> (Leviticus 10:9), the Bible expects drinking at celebratory occasions such as festivals and worship: <<*Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes'*>> (Luke 22:17-18). Jesus even provided the wine for the wedding party at Cana; refer to John 2:1-10.

You and your household rejoicing together. Laws like this reveal that God is a common-sense God. He does not place unreasonable demands on his people. He made a way for them to more conveniently tithe, and they are to enjoy doing so: <<*On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days*>> (Leviticus 23:40), and: <<*these you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God at the place that the Lord your God will choose, you together with your son and your daughter, your male and*

female slaves, and the Levites resident in your towns, rejoicing in the presence of the Lord your God in all your undertakings>> (Deuteronomy 12:18).

²⁷ As for the Levites resident in your towns, do not neglect them, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you.

Deuteronomy 14:27

As for the Levites resident in your towns, do not neglect them. The Levites received no land as their inheritance but were scattered throughout the lands of the other tribes in order to minister to them. Therefore, God had decreed that the people should provide for the Levites in recognition of the work they were doing for God and his people. This principle remains valid in the church today: <<*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching*>> (1 Timothy 5:17).

²⁸ Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; ²⁹ the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.

Deuteronomy 14:28-29

Some believe this to be an additional tithe due every third year and was to be for the benefit of the Levites and other landless people, who would potentially be poor. It is to be given to them within your towns and not at the central sanctuary (v.23). In a chapter emphasising the holiness of Israel apart from other nations, the inclusion of the foreigner (v.21) shows the inclusiveness of Deuteronomy. However, since it speaks of the tithe, and since it also went to the Levite and not only to the poor, it is best to understand that this was not an additional tithe, but a command that once every three years the tithe also be available to the poor, not only to the Levite.

So that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake. God will bless the giving heart. Ask anyone who gives as the Bible instructs them to give, for they are blessed.

The NT nowhere specifically commands tithing, but it certainly does speak of it in a positive light, if it is done with a right heart: <<*But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practised, without neglecting the others*>> (Luke 11:42). It is also important to understand that tithing is not a principle dependent on the Mosaic Law; as Hebrews 7:5-9 explains, tithing was

practiced and honoured by God before the Law of Moses. What the NT does speak with great clarity on is the principle of giving; that giving should be regular, planned, proportional, and private (1 Corinthians 16:1-4); and that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians Chapter 9). Since the NT does not emphasise tithing, one might not insist on it for Christians, although some Christians do argue against tithing on the basis of self-interest. Yet since giving is to be proportional, Christians should be giving some percentage, and ten percent is a good benchmark and starting place. For some to give ten percent is nowhere near enough; for others, at their present time, five percent may be a massive step of faith. If a person's question is, "How little can I give and still be pleasing to God?" their heart is not in the right place at all. All should have the attitude of some early Christians, who essentially said: "We're not under the tithe, we can give more!" Giving and financial management is a spiritual issue, not just a financial one: <<*If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?*>> (Luke 16:11).